



Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
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# Ponaganset High School

GLOCESTER

## THE SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

April 2, 2004



### **School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)**

**The school accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## **The Purpose and Limits of This Report**

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Ponaganset High School from March 29 through April 2, 2004.

The SALT visit report makes every effort to provide your school with a valid, specific picture of how well your students are learning. The report also portrays how the teaching in your school affects learning, and how the school supports learning and teaching. The purpose of developing this information is to help you make changes in teaching and the school that will improve the learning of your students. The report is valid because the team's inquiry is governed by a protocol that is carefully designed to make it possible for visit team members to make careful judgments using accurate evidence. The careful exercise of professional judgment makes the findings useful for school improvement because these judgments identify where the visit team thinks the school is doing well, and where it is doing less well.

The major questions the team addressed were:

How well do students learn at Ponaganset High School?

How well does the teaching at Ponaganset High School affect learning?

How well does Ponaganset High School support learning and teaching?

The following features of this visit are at the heart of the report:

Members of the visit team are primarily teachers and administrators from Rhode Island public schools. The majority of team members are teachers. The names and affiliations of the team members are listed at the end of the report.

The team sought to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school is unique and the team has tried to capture what makes Ponaganset High School distinct.

The team did not compare this school to any other school.

When writing the report, the team deliberately chose words that it thought would best convey its message to the school, based on careful consideration of what it had learned about the school.

**The team reached consensus on each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.**

The team made its judgment explicit.

This report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report is not based on what the school plans to do in the future or on what it has done in the past.

This school visit is supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education as a component of School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT). To gain the full advantages of a peer visiting system, RIDE deliberately did not participate in the active editing of this SALT visit report. That was carried out by the team's Chair with the support of Catalpa. Ltd.

The team closely followed a rigorous protocol of inquiry that is rooted in Practice-based Inquiry™ (Catalpa Ltd). The detailed *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit* describes the theoretical constructs behind the SALT visit and stipulates the many details of the visit procedures. Contact Rick Richards at (401) 222-4600 x 2194 or [ride0782@ride.ri.net](mailto:ride0782@ride.ri.net) for further information about the *Handbook* or other SALT protocols. The *Handbook* and other relevant documents are also available at [www.Catalpa.org](http://www.Catalpa.org).

SALT visits undergo rigorous quality control. Catalpa Ltd. monitors each visit and determines whether the report can be endorsed. Endorsement assures the reader that the team and the school followed the visit protocol. It also assures that the conclusions and the report meet specified standards.

## Sources of Evidence

The Sources of Evidence that this team used to support its conclusions are listed in the appendix.

The team spent a total of over 150 hours in direct classroom observation. Most of this time was spent in observing complete lessons or classes. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once. In addition, team members spent over 30 hours in conversations with various administrators, teachers and staff members throughout the week.

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 33 hours in team meetings spanning the five days of the visit. This time does not include the time the team spent in classrooms, with teachers, and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators.

The team did agree by consensus that every conclusion in this report is:

Important enough to include in the report

Supported by the evidence the team gathered during the visit

Set in the present, and

Contains the judgment of the team

## Using the Report

This report is designed to have value to all audiences concerned with how Ponaganset High School can improve student learning. However, the most important audience is the school itself.

How your school improvement team reads and considers the report is the critical first step. RIDE will provide a SALT Fellow to lead a follow-up session with the school improvement team to help start the process. With support from the Foster-Glocester Regional School Improvement Coordinator and from SALT fellows, the school improvement team should carefully decide what changes it wants to make in learning, teaching, and the school, and amend its School Improvement Plan to reflect these decisions.

The Foster-Glocester Regional School District, RIDE and the public should consider what the report says or implies about how they can best support Ponaganset High School as it works to strengthen its performance.

Any reader of this report should consider the report as a whole. A reader who only looks at recommendations misses important information.

## 2. PROFILE OF PONAGANSET HIGH SCHOOL

Situated in Glocester, Ponaganset High School is the regional high school for the towns of Foster and Glocester, Rhode Island. While they have become more suburban during the last ten years, the character of these communities, remains quite rural. Constructed in 1966, the school's basic design is a rectangular ring. It was renovated and expanded in 1990 to include a new auditorium, a gymnasium, a music suite, art classrooms, a media studio, two computer labs, and several general classrooms. The school population has already outgrown this space, which was built for 800 students with approximately 1000 projected for the 2004-2005 school year. Plans for financing the expansion of the high school into the Ponaganset Middle School, along with the construction of a new middle school, are under discussion.

A staff of a principal, two assistant principals, 67 full-time and seven part-time teachers, four full-time guidance counselors, a school nurse/teacher, a school psychologist, a crisis intervention counselor and a student assistance counselor service this school. The faculty consists of both new and veteran teachers, as 36% have worked five years or less in education and 25% have worked 15 years or more. According to the most recent SALT Survey, 58% of the teachers possess a master's degree.

Of the 936 students attending Ponaganset High School, 637 reside in Glocester and 295 reside in Foster. Four paid tuition students attend as well. The racial-ethnic makeup of the student population is quite homogeneous: 99.0% are white, 0.5% is Hispanic, and less than 0.5% is African American and Asian. Nearly 14% of the students receive some type of special education services and 9.8% receive free and reduced-price lunch.

Based on its state assessments and other indicators of success, the school has earned the highest performance classification of the Rhode Island Department of Education for each of the last two years. In addition, it was selected as a Regents Commended School in 2002. The successful music program is also a source of pride for the school community. Forty percent of the students participate in the band and/or choral programs. The high quality of the band and chorus has been recognized at annual national band and choral festivals.

During the last three years, the school has been mission driven, using the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Standards for Accreditation as its blueprint for improvement. The school is involved in a major initiative of implementing digital portfolios. Beginning with the Class of 2007, all students will create, maintain and exhibit digital portfolios containing their best work as a proficiency-based graduation requirement. The framework for the portfolio is the Ponaganset Performance Graduation Expectations (PGE), a listing of what each student should know and be able to do upon graduating from the school. The initiative is supported by a \$100,000 Champlin Foundation grant that was awarded in 2002, which allowed the school to upgrade its technology substantially.

### **3. PORTRAIT OF PONAGANSET HIGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

Ponaganset High School is tucked away on a country road in the rural community of Glocester. It is neat, clean and bright with plenty of windows that overlook the surrounding woodlands. Students are polite, respectful and helpful. Staff members are quick to answer questions; the teachers are warm and welcoming; and the administrators have set the tone for an orderly school environment.

The student body and the faculty demonstrate mutual respect and a shared pride in the Ponaganset High School traditions. The school is the hub of many school and community activities. Various athletic teams, choral and instrumental groups, and other extracurricular offerings provide students with chances to excel. The students love their school and feel safe here.

Teachers work hard to make their lessons meaningful. They use a variety of strategies to engage their students and increase their abilities to think critically and to be independent learners. However, traditional teacher-directed lessons prevail, which often do not meet the learning needs of students in the various tracks.

The school is just beginning to implement a variety of new and effective initiatives. These tools directed at improving student achievement include: digital portfolios, anchor assessments and higher student expectations and student outcomes. As the school phases in these initiatives, faculty members express a need for more formal professional development to aid them in their work. The technology, the technical training and the support needed for creating these digital portfolios is not adequate at this time. The facility, textbooks and equipment are a bit worn, and all need attention. More classrooms are required.



## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Conclusions

Students write for many classroom purposes. They write to summarize, reflect, respond to readings and prompts, persuade, analyze and explain processes. All students produce research papers. Students are beginning to use the school-wide writing rubrics to evaluate their own writing and the writing of others. While most students regularly write substantive pieces such as analytical essays in upper level courses, there are fewer examples of complex writing at the other levels. Currently, students in these levels participate predominately in teacher directed writing such as simple summary and personal response formats and very infrequently in more sophisticated and self-selected writing. Therefore, they are not practicing the skills they need to be effective writers. *(observing classes, following students, talking with students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments)*

In most classes students do not problem solve. In a few classes they solve rudimentary problems. In a limited number of classes, students problem solve extensively and very effectively. In these classes, students participate in real world situations, which include hull design and bridge building. In addition, students use high level thinking skills when they analyze situations, interpret text and imagine new contexts to create scripts. They also develop and perform student created monologues based on their understanding of characters from plays they have read. They engage in court trials, give impromptu speeches, consider and discuss hypothetical situations, respond to writing prompts and provocative questions, and teach their fellow students using PowerPoint presentations. Those students, who engage in this kind of learning, demonstrate a clear understanding of the complex problems they undertake to solve; they apply the tools they have learned to solve such problems; and they reflect on their solutions. The high quality of student work demonstrates that these students are invested in their learning. *(following students, observing classes, meetings with students and parents, reviewing 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, reviewing school improvement plan, talking with students, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

Students read often and at varying levels of proficiency. Most students in the basic, standard and advanced classes do not read critically; instead, they read primarily for basic understanding of the text. While they sometimes require help in processing information and understanding vocabulary and main ideas, they frequently need assistance in analyzing and interpreting what they read. The 2003 New Standards Reference Examination results align with these findings for they indicate that only fifty-two percent of the students meet the standard in reading for basic understanding, and only forty-one percent meet the standard in reading analysis and interpretation. In stark contrast, students in honors and advanced placement classes read with a higher level of proficiency. They know how to read more complex material, to read independently and collaboratively, to explore the underlying meaning of what they read and to make claims and draw conclusions based on that reading. At this time, only some students develop and practice the techniques they need to become effective readers. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing 2003 SALT Survey report, reviewing 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries)*

Many students at Ponaganset High School are conscientious and willing learners. They strive to meet whatever academic and behavioral expectations are set in the classroom. They participate in class discussions, are active note takers and are invested in their learning. Students at all academic levels show the capacity to respond to challenges and risks. They react positively to group work, peer review and hands-on activities. Most learners at Ponaganset High School learn well when they are active participants, rather than when they are passive receivers of information. Passive students often exhibit disruptive or disengaged behavior. Although traditional lectures are well received in some honors and advanced level classes, all students at Ponaganset High School value and desire activities that foster exploration and higher level thinking. *(following students, meeting with students and parents, talking with students and parents, observing classes)*

### **Important Thematic Findings in Student Learning**

Students are involved in higher order thinking skills in too few classes across the curriculum.

Students value opportunities to explore and respond to challenges.

The depth of student learning varies with each student's academic placement.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING FOR LEARNING

### Conclusions

Too often teacher expectations are low in regard to problem solving and other related higher order thinking skills. Fortunately, some teachers expect high-level problem solving and create classes in which students actively participate in real world situations and authentic contexts. Examples of classes where this occurs include technology education, family and consumer science, industrial arts, science labs, music, art, computer aided design, and health. Unfortunately, not many teachers use activities that require students to apply their problem solving techniques and skills. Most teachers ask students to respond to questions and prompts, but they do not proceed to use these responses to encourage students to think critically or to apply what they have learned. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, meeting with students, reviewing classroom assessments, talking with students and teachers)*

Teachers at Ponaganset High School do not routinely require their students to read challenging materials, either inside or outside the classroom. Although they ask their students to read often, the complexity of the material is low. When teachers require students to respond to what they have read, they most often ask them to show a limited demonstration of their basic understanding. Few teachers across the curriculum encourage, support and instruct students in critical reading and interpretation through student-centered discussions and experiences. Consequently, most students are not given the opportunity to develop the skills required of critical readers. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students, reviewing 2003 SALT Survey report, reviewing 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, talking with students, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

To improve their students' writing abilities, teachers assign many kinds of exercises that range from simple summaries to complex research papers. Teachers routinely correct, edit and make short comments about their students' writing. In the ninth grade teachers and students are beginning to use the digital portfolio during the revision process. Teachers also assign and grade written anchor assignments across the curriculum. Occasionally, teachers directly instruct students in writing, but not in a sustained or systematic way. Although school wide rubrics have been developed to assess students' work, teachers do not yet use them effectively to create their writing assignments. As a result, students do not write sophisticated, complex material. Assignments usually do not encourage them to explore in depth what they write about or to reflect on how they write. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing 2003 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

From class to class, teacher to teacher and level to level, teachers have different expectations for student behavior. In general, teachers and students exhibit good camaraderie and decorum. This informal interaction creates a friendly climate in some classrooms. In other classrooms, this informal interaction creates off task, disruptive or rude behavior for which teachers seldom assign consequences. Students resent these classroom interruptions because they impede learning. In other situations, when teachers do attempt to assign consequences for inappropriate student behavior, they report that there is little recourse available to them. Teachers of the basic and standard classes tolerate significantly more disrespectful conduct than teachers in the other classes. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, meeting with students and school administrators)*

Academically, the faculty does not challenge all of its students. It creates few activities that engage students in their own learning. This is most prevalent in the basic and standard classes, where lectures, worksheets and textbooks dominate instruction. Although teachers in the higher-level courses regularly use these same practices, they also provide students with more opportunities for cooperative learning and discussion. Overall, most teachers do not use the latest professional practices such as inquiry-based learning and differentiated instruction. Due to the limited use of these practices, combined with low expectations for their students, teachers do not fully meet the learning needs of many of their students. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, parents, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments)*

Teachers at Ponaganset High School acknowledge their need and desire for professional growth and development. They understand the importance of learning new ways to improve their instruction. Some faculty members create occasions to meet informally during their own time to discuss their students, lesson plans and classroom practices. Teachers are frustrated because there are too few school-based opportunities for them to develop, discuss and implement the curriculum. Similarly, teachers do not have ample opportunities to share their practices and to solve problems connected with their classroom instruction and their management of student behavior. Teachers report that team, department and faculty meeting times are not sufficient to support their professional growth. Crowded teaching schedules and shared classrooms, with teachers moving from room to room, make it very difficult for teachers to communicate professionally with their peers. Despite the lack of common planning time, ninth-grade teachers are beginning to use protocols for discussing, evaluating and interpreting their students' work. This practice, however, is limited to a few teachers and does not extend to the rest of the school. The dearth of professional development time limits teachers' efforts to improve their teaching and student learning. *(talking with teachers, school, and district administrators, meeting with school and district administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing 2003 SALT Survey report)*

**Commendations for Ponaganset High School**

Hardworking, dedicated, caring teachers

Loyal, cooperative faculty

**Recommendations for Ponaganset High School**

Raise the academic and behavioral expectations for all students.

Develop student-centered classrooms.

Create high-level problem solving in all classes.

Regularly engage students in critical reading and writing.

Encourage students to reflect on their work.

Create and use frequent opportunities for meaningful professional development centered on these current teaching practices.

**Recommendations for Ponaganset High School Administration**

Develop a schedule that will support better learning and teaching.

Create time in the schedule for professional collaboration.

Support teachers who are having difficulty in classroom management.

## 6. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

### Conclusions

The school is the hub of activity for the towns of Foster and Glocester. Parents believe that the door is open to them and that teachers and administrators do respond to their concerns. Parents say that the school values them. Technology facilitates communication between the school and families. Progress reports on each student are mailed home at least every three weeks. The athletic and music programs create a strong connection between the community and the school. The business community provides School to Career opportunities through Project Jobs and job shadowing for all tenth graders. It is a cohesive community, which considers this school and everyone in it as part of its family. This keen sense of community and community pride creates a strong foundation for learning. *(meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, observing the school outside the classroom, talking with students, teachers, parents, school and district administrators)*

The various programs and courses that Ponaganset High School offers its faculty with Article 31 funds include Course One, Advanced Placement Training and the Rhode Island Writing Project. The school has found creative means to train teachers in applying technology by implementing its “Tech Fridays” program. Enthusiasm for this training is high, resulting in an over subscription that precludes many of the faculty from participation. Collaboration among teachers does take place on an informal basis; for example, they participate in ad hoc groups to generate anchor assignments. Still, the school has not implemented a systemic structure that supports this activity. The school uses some time during its monthly faculty, leadership and department meetings for professional development, although this is not sufficient to meet the teachers’ needs. Additionally, the school neglects the development of its new teachers by not implementing a formal mentoring plan. Finally, the school lacks a professional development plan that aligns instruction, curriculum and assessment with its reform initiatives. *(talking with teachers, school and district administrators, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies)*

Ponaganset High School offers students courses at six levels: fundamental, basic, standard, advanced, honors and Advanced Placement. Students in higher-level courses are held to expectations that are notably higher than those held for students in lower level courses. This structure perpetuates lower achievement for students in the lower tracks. The lack of a formal, rigorous, written, standards-based curriculum at this time compounds this disparity. *(observing classes, following students, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators and parents, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing course catalogue, reviewing anchor assignments)*

Ponaganset High School is in the early stages of developing and implementing several new school-wide initiatives. The administrators strongly support school reform through the incorporation of the digital portfolio, anchor assessments, ninth grade teaming and advisories. The digital portfolio, involving all ninth graders, is designed to meet the Rhode Island regulations for proficiency-based graduation requirements. Teachers, students and parents express concern that the current available technology does not support the scope of such a project. The intent of anchor assessments and learning outcomes is to provide consistency among levels and teachers of the same courses; however, more time is needed to both develop and implement these initiatives. Ponaganset High School works to personalize the learning environment through the use of homeroom advisories. Additionally, ninth grade students are teamed; unfortunately, teachers do not have adequate common planning time to make this structure more effective. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, school and district administrators, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies, reviewing district strategic plan)*

The administrators of Ponaganset High School share a common vision for raising the performance of their students; they work well together and enjoy the support of the school community. They have put many of their initiatives into action this year. As these initiatives move into the classrooms, issues of a limited budget, inadequate technology and overcrowded facilities have become apparent. For example, teachers and students are struggling with unreliable and inadequate technology to enter their work into digital portfolios. This is a result of insufficient fiscal resources to upgrade current technology and to support its use. In addition, the majority of faculty members say they need training in instructional technology. This training is hindered by a number of scheduling, contractual and budgetary issues, such as the lack of school control over Article 31 monies and the failure of the district to release these funds to the school. While there are several sources of leadership within the school, such as the school improvement team, department heads and the ninth grade instructional teams, the administrators are just beginning to empower these groups to move this ambitious program of initiatives forward. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents)*

Ponaganset High School makes technology a priority, and through a Champlin Grant, it recently purchased three new computer labs and peripheral devices. A community agency within the town donated two Smart Boards to the school. The high school also maintains a television production facility, as well as places televisions and VCRs in every classroom. Most rooms have at least one computer. Edline, implemented this year, allows communication between the school and parents via the Internet. Teachers learn to use PowerPoint and to manage digital portfolios on "Tech Fridays." In turn, they teach their students these skills. Overall, the school has made many gains in technology; however, there are still needs to be addressed. Teachers and students both report that technology is often unavailable or that it is not functioning properly. Some departments, such as math and special education, are under served. Other forms of technology such as microscopes, graphing and scientific calculators are also in short supply. Plans for the effective use and maintenance of this technology are required to make this initiative viable and accessible to the whole school. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside the classroom, talking with students, teachers, parents, school and district administrators, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, reviewing 2003 SALT Survey report, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Due to the growth of the community, the enrollment now stresses the capacity of the building. Teachers are sharing rooms; lunch periods are overcrowded; and storage is practically nonexistent. Administrators, teachers, students and parents express concern about the growing population and the increasing inadequacy of the facility. While there are plans in the district to alleviate this situation, this overcrowding impedes student learning at this time. *(observing the school outside the classroom, following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, reviewing Foster-Glocester Regional School Committee Request for Approval of School Construction Project, October 2003)*



**Commendations for Ponaganset High School**

Positive and ambitious initiatives for school reform

Communication with parents

Safe, nurturing environment

The promising vision of the school leadership

**Recommendations for Ponaganset High School**

Develop and implement a standards based curriculum.

Reduce or eliminate tracking of students.

Raise expectations for all students.

Implement a planned program of professional development to move the school in a common direction. Use the 2003 SALT Survey report Staff Chart G-2 to determine this direction.

Revise the schedule to accommodate common planning time.

Support new teachers through mentoring and classroom management training.

Develop a plan for the equitable use and timely maintenance of technology. Follow through on this plan.

**Recommendations for Foster-Glocester School District**

Release Article 31 money for professional development at Ponaganset High School.

Assure a robust technology support and maintenance process.

Follow through on hiring a curriculum and professional development coordinator.

Follow through on your building plan.

Provide sufficient funds to upgrade instructional materials.

Develop and implement a mentoring program for new teachers.

## **7. FINAL ADVICE TO PONAGANSET HIGH SCHOOL**

Ponaganset High School is a proud learning community. As expressed in its mission statement, it values respect, hard work and perseverance. The school works hard to implement an ambitious set of reform initiatives. The students, staff and community are pleased with the school's "High Performing" designation. Do not rest on your laurels. As you continue to implement these effective new reform initiatives, focus on the all important connections between the initiatives and your students and their learning.

Students require greater challenge; engage them in critical thinking and problem solving in all curricular areas. It is important that you maintain high expectations for all students, regardless of their level or track, and that you support their intellectual curiosity about the world. Ponaganset High School students thrive when classroom activities are student-centered and creative. New and varied teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction, cooperative learning and inquiry-based instruction are needed in more of your classrooms. A cohesive and rigorous curriculum must be developed.

Your students obviously trust and love you. They are ready to take greater risks. Trust them, and give them the freedom they need to explore what they are learning. Allow them to invent the ways in which they learn. Counsel and coach them; be the facilitators of their education. As you seek to improve your craft, do not rely on outside sources for your learning. Work collaboratively with other teachers within the school to develop the expertise required to implement the changes in instruction that are described in this report. To get the job done, you must demand support for professional development and time from your district. Your students will reap the benefits of your continued hard work on their behalf. Good luck to you in this endeavor.

## ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

### Ponaganset High School

April 2, 2004

Catalpa Ltd. monitors all SALT visits and examines each SALT visit team report to determine whether it should be endorsed as a legitimate SALT report. The endorsement decision is based on procedures and criteria specified in *Endorsing SALT Visit Team Reports* (available on the Catalpa website).

Catalpa Ltd. bases its judgment about the legitimacy of a report on these three questions:

Did the SALT visit team and the host school conduct the visit in a manner that is reasonably consistent with the protocol for the visit?

Do the conclusions of the report meet the tests for conclusions specified in the visit protocol (important, accurate, set in present, shows the team's judgment)?

Does the report meet the tests for a report as specified in the visit protocol (fair, useful, and persuasive of productive action)?

Using the answers to these questions, the final decision to endorse the report answers the overall endorsement question: Is this a legitimate SALT team visit report? In order to make this determination, Catalpa weighs all the questions and issues that have been raised to decide whether a report is legitimate or not. While it is possible that a challenge related to one of the three questions listed above would be serious enough to withhold or condition the endorsement, it is more likely that issues serious enough to challenge a report's legitimacy will cut across the three questions.

While the SALT visit protocol requires that all SALT visits are conducted to an exceptionally high standard of rigor, visits are "real-life" events; it is impossible to control for all unexpected circumstances that might arise. The protocol for the conduct of the visit is spelled out in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1<sup>st</sup> edition*.

Since unexpected circumstances might result in either the team or the school straying too far from the protocol for a visit, Catalpa Ltd. monitors both the school and the team during a visit regarding the conduct of the visit.

Most often actual visit events or issues do not challenge a report's legitimacy and Catalpa's monitoring and endorsement is routine. A district administrator, principal, faculty member or parent may not like a report, or think it is too negative, or think the visit should have been conducted in a manner that is not consistent with the protocol. None of these represent a challenge to a report's legitimacy; concerns that might challenge an endorsement are based on events that stray too far from the protocol.

The Catalpa Ltd. review of this visit was not routine. After the reading of the report, the school raised numerous concerns about the visit and the report that it believed should be addressed.

The steps Catalpa Ltd. completed for this review were:

discussion with the chair about issues related to the visit before it began

daily discussion of issues with the visit chair during the visit

March 31. A two-and-a-half-hour observing visit of the team during the actual visit; this is part of my regular monitoring activities.

April 14. The post-visit Catalpa Ltd. interview with the principal, which is also part of normal monitoring

April 23. A special, face-to-face, two-and-a-half-hour factual review between the principal and the chair, requested by the principal. Given that it was clear the school had concerns at this point, I attended, as did the school's assistant principal.

On May 24, 2004, Mr. Maruszczak submitted a letter challenging the legitimacy of the report.

Catalpa Ltd. reviewed the 26 specific points he raised in his challenge letter. The resulting Catalpa Ltd. memo of June 30, 2004 lists additional steps and sources of evidence that were used in that review and that became part of the endorsement review.

Catalpa Ltd. found that none of the challenge points, either separately or together, challenge the legitimacy of either the conduct of the visit or the report itself.

The findings of the endorsement review of this report are:

1. The certification by RIDE staff that the membership composition of this team is correct.
2. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
3. The conclusions are legitimate SALT visit conclusions.
4. The report is a legitimate SALT visit report.
5. Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. fully endorses this report.
6. The completion of the school's challenge presents a new opportunity for the school to find how to use what in this report is of value to the school in strengthening its work to improve student learning.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD  
Catalpa Ltd.  
DATE: June 30, 2004

## REPORT APPENDIX

### Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examined test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Ponaganset High School was the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The team built its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, this visit allowed the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning, and support that actually takes place at Ponaganset High School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following sources of evidence:

- ◆ *direct classroom observation*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following twelve students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*
  - teachers*
  - school improvement team*
  - school and district administrators*
  - students*
  - parents*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *analyzing state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*
- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*
  - district and school policies and practices*
  - Foster-Glocester Regional Policy Manual*
  - Foster-Glocester Status Report 2003-2004 Fund 70 for Ponaganset High School document*
  - Foster Glocester Regional Schools Classroom Teacher Evaluation Handbook*
  - Foster Glocester Regional School Committee Goals/Objectives Planning Resource Book*
  - Agreement between the Foster Glocester School Committee and NEA Ponaganset, 2000-2003, 2000-2004*
  - 2002-2003 SALT Survey for Ponaganset High School binder*
  - Conceptual Design Options, Building Feasibility Study for Foster-Glocester Regional School System, August 5, 2003*

*Foster-Glocester Regional School Committee Request for Approval of School Construction Project, October 2003*

*InformationWorks! Measuring Rhode Island Schools for Change 2002, Foster Gloucester Schools*

*New England Association of Schools and Colleges Report of the Visiting Committee for Ponaganset High School, May 1998*

*Five Year Progress Report to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, March 1, 2003*

*records of professional development activities*

*classroom assessments*

*school improvement plan for Ponaganset High School*

*district strategic plan*

*2003 SALT Survey report*

*Ponaganset High School Evacuation Plan*

*Ponaganset High School Examples of Student Work binders*

*Ponaganset High School Tomahawk 2003 Senior Yearbook*

*Ponaganset High School Student Handbook Agenda*

*Ponaganset High School Advisory Program folder*

*Ponaganset High School Chieftains 2003-2004 Course Catalog*

*Ponaganset High School Parents Newsletters*

*Ponaganset High School Performance Graduation Expectations Draft 2, 2003-2004*

*Anchor Assignments/Use of PHS Learning Outcomes & Rubrics, FAQ's March 11, 2004*

*TGIF Principal's Newsletter*

*Ponaganset High School Teachers Handbook*

*Ponaganset High School Curriculum Frameworks binders*

*Ponaganset High School Share our Strength Student Assisted Mediation 2003-2004 binder*

*How to Organize a High School Career Mentor Program binder*

*Feinstein After School Mentor Clubs folder*

*classroom textbooks*

*2003 Information Works!*

*2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries*

*2003 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

*School and District Report Cards*

## **State Assessment Results for Ponaganset High School**

Assessment results create pieces of evidence that the visit team uses as it conducts its inquiry. The team uses this evidence to shape its efforts to locate critical issues for the school. It also uses this evidence, along with other evidence, to draw conclusions about those issues.

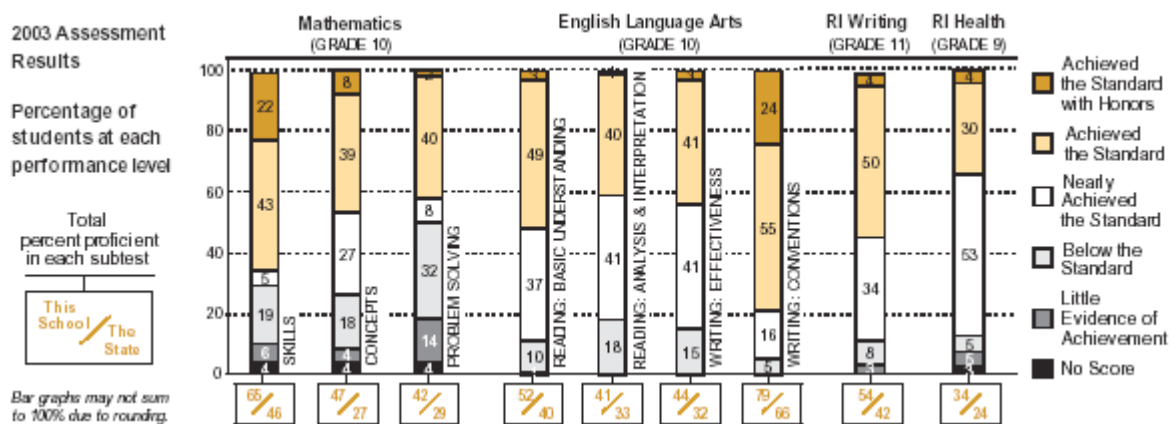
This school's results are from the latest available state assessment information. It is presented here in four different ways:

- ◆ *against performance standards;*
- ◆ *compared to similar students in the state;*
- ◆ *across student groups within the school;*
- ◆ *and over time.*

## RESULTS IN RELATION TO PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

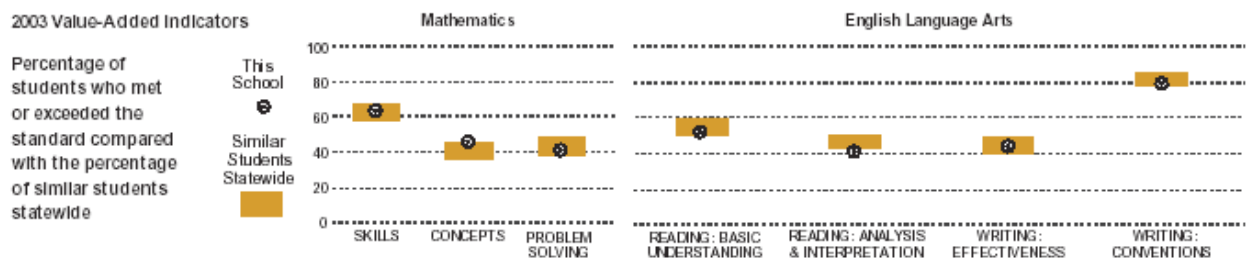
The first display shows how well the students do in relation to standards in English/Language Arts and mathematics. Student results are shown as the percentage of students taking the test whose score places them in the various categories at, above, or below the performance standard. Endorsed by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education in 1998, the tested standards can be found in the publication *New Standards Performance Standards*.

**Table 1. 2002-03 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments**



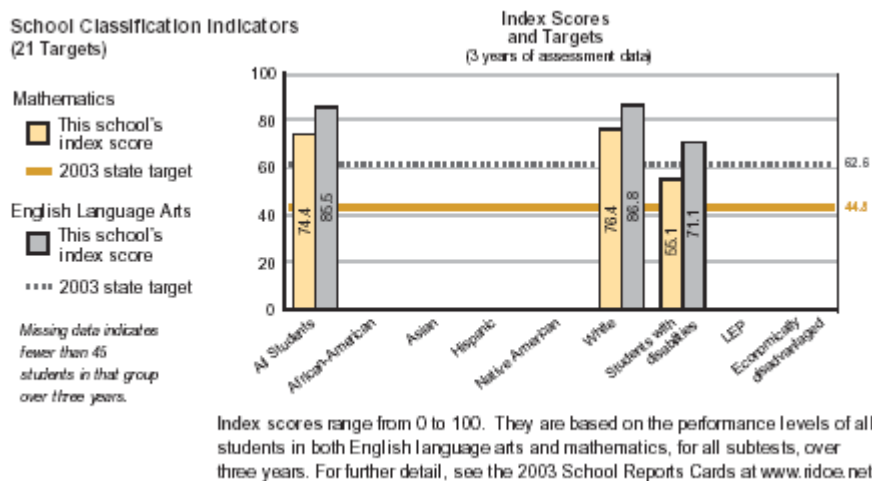
## RESULTS COMPARED TO SIMILAR STUDENTS IN THE STATE

This chart includes the performance levels of students with special education needs, students participating in ESL or bilingual programs, low socio-economic status (a composite of income level, racial background and parental education), as well as the performance of students with none of these characteristics. Taking all these characteristics into account, the graph displays the overall performance of students in this school compared to a group of students from across the state whose characteristics match this school's students.

*Table 2. 2002-2003 Student Results in Comparison to Similar Students Statewide*

### RESULTS ACROSS STUDENT GROUPS WITHIN THE SCHOOL

An important way to display student results is across different groups of students with different characteristics who are in the school. This display showing targets and index scores, in accordance with the No Child Left Behind federal legislation creates information about how well the school meets the learning needs of its various students. Since breaking students into these smaller groups can result in groups becoming too small to show accurate results, this display shows the results based on three years of testing.

*Table 3. 2002-2003 Student Results across Subgroups*

### SCHOOL REPORT CARD

The following is the school report card that shows the school's performance in relation to the 2003 annual measurable objectives (AMO). Ponaganset High School is categorized as a high performing and sustaining school on the basis of its assessment results from 2000-2003.

Information Works! data for Ponaganset High School is available at <http://www.ridoe.net>.



**THE PONAGANSET HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

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Science Teacher

Moriah Irace  
Student

Alicia Bailey  
Science Department Chair

Robert Irace  
Parent

Martha Condon  
Parent

Greg Laramie  
Parent

Paula Davis  
Parent, e-Bulletin Manager

Joe Maruszczak  
Principal

Paul Duhamel  
Art Teacher

Shane McConnell  
Assistant Principal

Patti Folsom  
Library-Media Specialist

Lorraine O'Connors  
Regional School Committee

Lisa Gelsomino  
Parent

Lisa Benedetti-Ramzi  
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